February 17, 2003, Monday

NATIONAL DESK

Representative Wants Colleague Censured for Internment Remarks

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 16 -- A Japanese-American representative from California has called for Republican leaders to condemn comments of a Republican colleague from North Carolina that Japanese-Americans were interned in World War II for their protection.

The representative, Michael M. Honda, a Democrat, compared the remarks of his colleague, Representative Howard Coble, to recent comments by Senator Trent Lott, of Mississippi. In December, Mr. Lott was pressured into resigning as majority leader after praising Strom Thurmond's 1948 presidential campaign, which promoted racial segregation.

Mr. Honda said he was "outraged" that Republican leaders had made no move, despite requests from Japanese-Americans, to persuade Mr. Coble to step down as chairman of the House subcommittee overseeing domestic security.

Mr. Coble said on a North Carolina radio show on Feb 4. that Japanese-Americans had been interned for their safety, but disagreed with a caller who said Arab-Americans should be confined.

"We were at war; they were an endangered species," Mr. Coble said. "For many of these Japanese-Americans, it wasn't safe for them to be on the street."

Mr. Coble later released a statement saying the internment was "the wrong decision and an action that should never be repeated." He has refused to give up the subcommittee post.

Speaking at a news conference on Saturday in Los Angeles, Mr. Honda said calls by the Asian-American Congressional caucus and Japanese-American groups for Mr. Coble to resign his chairmanship had been ignored by Republican leaders.

"They're notably silent on this," said Mr. Honda, who was interned with his family in World War II.

A government study after the war called the internment "a grave personal injustice" that was the result of "race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership." In 1990, the government began paying survivors $20,000.